



4 Myths About College Majors

After high school, students are often asked, “What college are you going to?” The follow up question they may dread is, “And what is your major?” Choosing an academic major is an important decision and there are some common misconceptions about majors and their relevance to a person’s career. Let’s examine a few:

1. It doesn’t matter what you major in.

It does matter. People who work a plan are more likely to succeed. This topic of college majors intrigues the media from time to time. Instead of focusing on the advantages of self-awareness and informed decision-making, they too often highlight celebrities who have been successful in spite of their college major or lack of education. Unfortunately, the story about the 51% of adults in the U.S. who are dissatisfied with their work because of ill-fitting jobs is depressing and gets lost. This job dissatisfaction is the result of using the trial-and-error method and giving little or no attention to making a plan.

2. You can get a job with any major.

There are jobs where the employer does not require a bachelor’s degree in a specific major and that offer training on the job, but those numbers are shrinking. Employers today want to hire the best prepared candidates who don’t need training; smaller staffs and tighter budgets demand it. Goal-oriented students who have combined coursework with career-related internships most quickly catch the attention of recruiters.

3. Choose your major based on your favorite subject.

This strategy can certainly work, but just because students like their coursework, it doesn’t mean they know the kind of career that is best for them that uses that major. Many students enjoy history, but if they don’t want to teach, jobs as historians are scarce (3,300 in the U.S.) and often require advanced degrees. Psychology is also a popular undergraduate major; yet few students realize that most jobs in psychology require a master’s degree or Ph.D., an additional 2-5 years of school. Better to find this out at the front end of the decision-making process rather than the last semester of college, so the need for additional education can be taken into account.



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4. Changing majors isn't a big deal.

When changing majors comes up as a topic of conversation, it's usually accompanied by embarrassed laughter. However, it's no joke when students make a series of poor choices, lose confidence and motivation, and struggle through college lacking any direction. When a bachelor's degree takes six or more years to complete, as it does for a third of the student population, families struggle with unexpected college expenses and students bury themselves under student loans. In a pinch, students cobble together a major just to graduate, and then attempt to find a job, still without knowing what they want to do. Students lose income they otherwise would have been earning if they had graduated on time, and society loses their productivity and contributions in the workplace.

Myths can be dispelled with factual information. To ensure student success in higher education, this means making informed decisions based on solid knowledge about oneself, occupations and work trends, and putting a plan into place.